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Third-graders testify in support of Cassis legislation

LANSING—A group of third-graders who inspired legislation sponsored by state Sen. Nancy Cassis to designate the cherry as the state fruit testified Thursday before a Senate committee in support of the bill.

The students from Heritage Elementary School in Highland Township, and their teachers, Cathy Stando and Claire Lannoye, had notified Cassis earlier this year that Michigan has no state fruit but is the top state in tart cherry production. Based on their recommendation, Cassis introduced Senate Bill 1013.

“Having these fine students here testifying in support of their bill was a wonderful opportunity for them,” said Cassis, R-Novi. “They not only got to learn about how a bill becomes law, but they showed us some of the passion that fueled their work in bringing about this legislation.”

Cassis cited information the students provided on the significance of cherries to the state economy. She also noted that the National Cherry Festival in Traverse City is expected to host more than half a million people this July.

“Some might consider this legislation trite, but that is shortsighted,” said Cassis, R-Novi. “The economic boost from the increased visibility of cherry and Michigan agriculture in general as well as the increased tourism dollars this legislation may provide is considerable.”

The students had sent letters to Cassis indicating how many tons of cherries Michigan produces, the percentage of the national crop and the nutritious properties of cherries. The state produces both sweet and tart cherries. The 2005 tart cherry crop was valued at more than \$47 million, and Michigan accounted for more than 75 percent of the nationwide total. Though not as dominant in sweet cherry production, Michigan produced an additional \$16 million in sweet cherries that year.

“I commend these students for their solid research,” said Cassis. “I agree with them that it is high time we recognize Michigan’s important role as the cherry capital of the nation by designating it the state fruit.”

Other state symbols include the state flower (apple blossom), state soil (Kalkaska sand), state stone (Petoskey), state fish (brook trout), state reptile (painted turtle), state fossil (mastodon), state tree (white pine), state gem (chlorastrolite), state wildflower (dwarf lake iris) and state mammal (white-tailed deer).

A photo of some of the Heritage Elementary School students testifying before the Local Urban and State Affairs Committee is available at:

www.senate.michigan.gov/gop/photowire/Cassis/Cassis.htm